SECRET EMPIRE™

MARVEL

#0

NICK SPENCER • DANIEL ACUÑA • ROD REIS

1945.
JAPAN.

STEVEN ROGERS--

--IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME.

KRAKEN--

--I'M HERE TO FULFILL MY MISSION.

HAIL HYDRA.

HAIL HYDRA. NOW, COME--

--WE DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME.

I MUST SAY, I'M *IMPRESSED*, STEVEN--

--YOU'VE COME SO FAR SINCE YOUR DAYS AS ONE OF MY STUDENTS. LOOK AT YOU *NOW*, *CAPTAIN AMERICA!*

HYDRA'S *GREATEST SPY*--POSING AS THE ALLIES' *SHINING HOPE* WHILE SHARING ALL THEIR SECRETS WITH *US.*

MADAME HYDRA WAS *RIGHT* TO BELIEVE IN YOU. PLEASE KNOW HOW PROUD I AM, AS WELL--

I ONLY DID WHAT I COULD, SIR. WE *ALL* DID.

HRM. I DON'T KNOW ABOUT THAT-- I WISH I HAD BEEN ABLE TO DO *MORE.*

IF I MAY ASK, SIR--IT'S BEEN *YEARS* SINCE ANYONE SAW YOU. I WASN'T EVEN SURE YOU WERE STILL *ALIVE.*

OH, I AM VERY MUCH *THAT,* I'M AFRAID. IF NOTHING ELSE.

WHEN THE WAR STARTED, I FOUND MYSELF CALLED BACK HERE, TO WHERE IT ALL BEGAN--

--THE SOURCE OF ALL HYDRA'S POWER.

...WHAT *IS* THE PLACE?

THIS IS ALL THAT REMAINS OF ASHOMIA. A LOST CITY OF THE WICKED AND THE ABANDONED. HERE WERE ONCE WRITTEN THE HIDDEN ARTS--

--BEFORE I TOOK THEM FOR MY OWN.

AND WHO ARE YOU?

THIS IS THE MAN WHO MADE ME THE KRAKEN. THE MAN WHO BIRTHED HYDRA FROM THE SPEAR. HE IS THE ***FATHER*** TO US ALL.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND-- I DON'T UNDERSTAND ANY OF THIS--

NOR DO YOU ***NEED*** TO, BOY. ONLY KNOW THAT THE SIGHT HAS SHOWN YOU TO BE OUR MESSENGER...

THIS IS WHAT MADAME HYDRA FORESAW WHEN SHE RECRUITED YOU, STEVEN--

--AND ***THIS*** IS WHAT THE ***CATALYST*** REVEALS.

THE WORLD WILL BE BENT. CHANGED. A BROKEN MIRROR. THE DEAD WILL BE THE LIVING, THE SERVANTS WILL BE THE MASTERS. BUT ONE WILL BE REBORN.

HE MEANS THE ALLIES' ***SECRET WEAPON***--ANY MOMENT NOW, THEY'LL USE THIS "COSMIC CUBE" TO REWRITE REALITY ITSELF.

THEY'LL MAKE IT SO THAT THEY, NOT HYDRA, WIN THE WAR--AND WHO CAN SAY WHAT ***ELSE*** THEY'LL CHANGE?

BUT THEY DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE ***POWER*** THEY WIELD--OR ITS CONSEQUENCES.

THE SHAPER WOMB WILL BE ALL THAT SURVIVES THE BREAK. SHE WILL BE LOST FOR A TIME, THEN MADE FLESH. AND THE USURPER WILL LEAD HER BACK TO THE PATH--

BACK TO ***YOU***, STEVEN.

SHE WILL FIND YOU, AND SHE WILL RESTORE YOU TO WHAT YOU WERE BEFORE THE ALLIES INTERFERED. YOU AND YOU ALONE.

YOU WILL TOIL AND SCHEME AND FIGHT--DO ALL THAT IS NECESSARY TO UNDO THEIR LIE--TO RESTORE THE ***WORLD THAT WAS.***

AND THUS, OUR REIGN WILL--

RMMMM

WHAT WAS THAT?

IT BEGINS.

QUICKLY, STEVEN--INTO THE POOL--IT WILL PROTECT YOU!

WHEN YOU AWAKEN, IT WILL BE IN THE MIDST OF A LIFE YOU NEVER LIVED.

YOU WILL REMEMBER THINGS YOU NEVER DID. BUT YOU MUST NEVER FORGET THE TRUTH--

--YOU MUST STAY STRONG, DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS-- NO MATTER WHAT ANYONE TELLS YOU--

--YOU ARE ***HYDRA.*** YOU ARE OUR ***CHAMPION!***

KRAKEN-- KRAKEN, WHAT ***IS*** THIS?!

JUST A TRICK, STEVEN--IT'S ALL JUST AN ILLUSION THEY DESIGNED, A PRISON THEY BUILT FOR US--

--BUT ***YOU*** CAN FREE US! YOU CAN FREE US ALL!

THIS IS WHAT YOU WERE MEANT TO DO.

HOLD TRUE TO WHAT YOU BELIEVE, AND DON'T BE AFRAID. DON'T ***EVER*** BE AFRAID. REMEMBER--

--THIS IS ***NOT*** HOW THE WORLD ENDS.

SECRET EMPIRE

CAPTAIN AMERICA'S REALITY HAS BEEN SECRETLY REWRITTEN BY KOBIK, A SENTIENT COSMIC CUBE ACTING UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF THE RED SKULL. IN ROGERS' NEW HISTORY, A HYDRA AGENT RECRUITED STEVE TO THE VILLAINOUS ORGANIZATION AS A CHILD, AND HE WAS RAISED TO BELIEVE IN THEIR IDEOLOGY: THE STRONG RULING THE WEAK, FOR THE GOOD OF ALL. HE'LL STOP AT NOTHING TO BRING HYDRA INTO POWER.

AND AFTER TAKING OVER FROM MARIA HILL AS DIRECTOR OF S.H.I.E.L.D., HE'S FINALLY READY TO MAKE HIS MOVE...

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Captain America

Sharon Carter

Mighigan

Ironheart

Iron Man

Alpha Flight Space Station

Ultimates

Captain Marvel

America Chavez

Spectrum

Blue Marvel

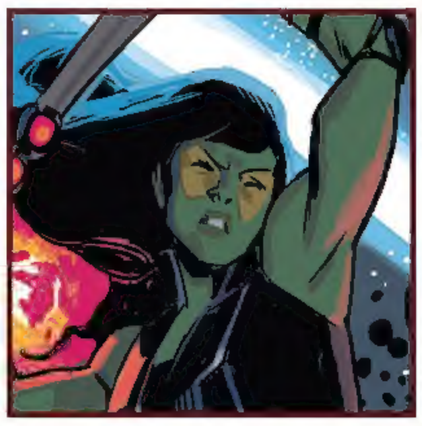
Quasar

Hyperion

Guardians

Rocket & Groot

Star-Lord



Gamora

New York City

Hydra Forces

Baron Zemo

Army of Evil

Defenders

Luke Cage

Jessica Jones

Iron Fist

Daredevil

Spider-Woman

Doctor Strange

Cloak

Dagger

Wasp

Rogue

Uncanny Avengers

HE WAS THE GREATEST AMONG US.

THE ONE WE LOOKED TO, TO LEAD US AND TO GUIDE US.

WE WERE *WRONG.*

WE'D LOST OUR WAY. MIRED IN CORRUPTION AND A THIRST FOR POWER, DIVIDED BY INFIGHTING, WE'D FORGOTTEN OUR CALLING.

AND IN THAT MOMENT, AT OUR WEAKEST, INSTEAD OF CHALLENGING OURSELVES, INSTEAD OF MAKING THINGS RIGHT--

--WE SIMPLY GAVE HIM MORE POWER AND MORE AUTHORITY. IT WAS EASIER TO LET HIM DO THAT WHICH WE WERE TOO WEAK TO DO OURSELVES--

--AND *THIS* IS THE PRICE WE PAID.

STEVE--

--ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

SORRY, SHARON, JUST... THINKING.

I DON'T BLAME YOU--THIS IS PRETTY OVERWHELMING. I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S ***WORSE***-- THAT I'M LOOKING AT ***THREE*** BLINKING RED DOTS ON THE ***TROUBLE MAP***--

--OR THAT ALL THREE ARE THINGS WE'VE SEEN COMING FOR MONTHS AND ***STILL*** COULDN'T FIND THE WILL TO STOP.

I'VE SEEN BAD BEFORE, BUT-- THIS FEELS ***DIFFERENT***. THIS FEELS LIKE THE ***END***.

NO--

--THIS IS ***NOT*** HOW THE WORLD ENDS.

LET'S TAKE THEM ONE AT A TIME.

RIGHT. THE CHITAURI INVASION FLEET HAS FINALLY ARRIVED--TRILLIONS OF THEM. EXPERTS ARE TELLING US THEY COULD ELIMINATE 90 PERCENT OF THE EARTH'S POPULATION WITHIN ***FOUR HOURS*** IF THEY MAKE LANDFALL.

BUT WE HAVE AN ANSWER. CAPTAIN MARVEL-- HOW ARE THINGS IN THE STARS?

WELL, IF THIS IS A SUICIDE MISSION, I'M HAPPY TO REPORT WE'RE DOING IT THE RIGHT WAY--

AND TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE, OUR BEST SOLUTION--THE PLANETARY DEFENSE SHIELD-- WAS TAKEN OUT AT ITS MAIN STATION BY A ***HYDRA SUICIDE BOMBER*** HOURS AGO. WE'RE TRYING TO FIGURE OUT THE CONNECTION THERE.

DIE WITH YOUR BOOTS ON, PEOPLE!

THERE'S TOO MANY OF THESE DAMN THINGS, CAP--WE'RE NOT GONNA BE ABLE TO HOLD THEM BACK FOR LONG.

WE'RE JUST TRYING TO CORRAL THEM FOR NOW--FUNNEL THEM WHERE WE WANT THEM TO GO--

"--LET *QUASAR* TAKE CARE OF THE REST.

"AS A STOPGAP, SHE'S PRETTY AMAZING, BUT SHE CAN ONLY KILL AS FAR AS SHE CAN SEE, AND THESE THINGS STRETCH BACK FOR **PLANETS.**"

I SURE COULD USE A *GIANT IMPENETRABLE FORCE-FIELD* SURROUNDING THE EARTH ABOUT NOW...

I HEAR YOU, CAROL. JUST HOLD TIGHT. YOU'LL BE HAPPY TO KNOW--

"--I'VE GOT TWO OF OUR *BEST PEOPLE* ON IT."

TONY, RIRI, HOW ARE WE DOING DOWN THERE?

WELL, I CAN TELL YOU THAT **NOTHING** IS COLOR-CODED PROPERLY. BEYOND THAT? IT'S GOVERNMENT WORK, SO I CAN'T BE SURE HOW MUCH IS DAMAGE FROM THE BOMBING AND HOW MUCH IS DUE TO **SHODDY CONTRACTS.**

WE'LL GET IT UP AND RUNNING, SIR. HE'S JUST BEING--

--HIM. TRUST ME, I KNOW, MS. WILLIAMS. BETTER THAN ANYONE.

WE'RE IN GOOD HANDS THERE. LET'S LOOK AT THE NEXT PROBLEM--

RIGHT--

"--NEW YORK IS BURNING."

LESS THAN AN HOUR AGO, AN ARMY OF SUPER-POWERED CRIMINALS SWARMED ONTO THE STREETS OF MIDTOWN. DOZENS OF THEM, WITH ONE THING IN COMMON--

--THEY WERE ***ALL*** INMATES IN MARIA HILL'S LITTLE REALITY-WARP COSMIC CUBE PRISON...

"...PLEASANT HILL."

CITIZENS OF NEW YORK! I AM GRAVITON, AND YOU HAVE BEEN LIED TO.

S.H.I.E.L.D., YOUR SO-CALLED *PROTECTORS*, WHO *CLAIM* TO BE ON THE SIDE OF GOOD, HAVE COMMITTED AN *UNCONSCIONABLE CRIME.*

THEY CREATED A *SECRET PRISON,* WHERE OUR INALIENABLE HUMAN RIGHTS WERE *TRAMPLED* UPON-- WHERE THEY FORCIBLY REWROTE OUR LIVES AND TOOK OUR FREE WILL--

--AND WHEN IT ALL CAME CRASHING DOWN, INSTEAD OF ADMITTING WHAT THEY HAD DONE--THEY SOUGHT TO HIDE THE TRUTH FROM YOU--FROM ALL OF *US!*

KNOW THAT IT IS THEIR SINS YOU DIE FOR NOW!

WE'RE MOBILIZING RESPONSES IN WAVES.

AND THE FIRST ONE IS ALREADY IN THE FIELD.

ALL RIGHT, LET'S DO THIS, DEFENDERS! SHOW THESE SUCKERS WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THEY MESS WITH OUR CITY!

WHICH THEY DO ALL THE TIME.

BUT THEY SHOULD STOP.

AND THEN THERE'S *OUR* OBJECTIVE.

"HYDRA FORCES INVADED THE CAPITAL CITY OF SOKOVIA, AND THE GOVERNMENT FORMALLY SURRENDERED, HANDING THE KEYS OVER--

"--INCLUDING THE LAUNCH CODES FOR SEVEN PREVIOUSLY-THOUGHT-DESTROYED SOVIET-ERA NUCLEAR ASSETS--

"--WHICH THEY'VE NOW THREATENED TO TURN ON ***MAJOR EUROPEAN TARGETS*** IF WE DON'T RECOGNIZE HYDRA'S NEW REGIME."

TO MAKE MATTERS ***WORSE,*** OUR BASE IN THE AREA-- ***HELICARRIER CRESCENT***-- FELL OFF RADAR AND OUT OF RADIO CONTACT TWO HOURS LATER.

WE DON'T HAVE ANY RADIATION MARKINGS, AND SATELLITES ARE BEING WEIRDLY UNCOOPERATIVE, BUT THE FEAR IS HYDRA TURNED ONE OF THE WARHEADS ON IT--

"--SO WE'RE SENDING IN THE BULK OF OUR FLEET-- INCLUDING ***ILIAD*** HERE-- TO CONFIRM VISUAL AND PUT A STOP TO ALL THIS. ONE SHIP FOR EVERY WARHEAD WE KNOW OF--

"--NEVER LET IT BE SAID WE'RE NOT ***THOROUGH.***"

HE HAD ALWAYS BEEN A MASTER STRATEGIST--BUT FREED FROM COMPASSION AND MERCY, ***THIS*** WAS HIS ***MASTERPIECE.***

IT WAS A PERFECT ATTACK.

ALREADY DIVIDED, WE FOUND OURSELVES PULLED IN SO MANY DIRECTIONS AT ONCE--

--THAT OUR BEST WAS NO LONGER *ENOUGH.*

WE HAD STOOD FOR SO LONG, WE DIDN'T EVEN KNOW WHAT IT FELT LIKE TO FALL--

--BUT FALL WE DID.

THIS IS HOW WE WERE OVERWHELMED, AND OVERRUN.

THIS IS HOW WE WERE *BETRAYED.*

KEEP AT THEM! DON'T LET UP!

"DON'T LET UP," SHE SAYS--LIKE THEY'RE *GROWING* ON US.

I DUNNO, QUILL--THEY'RE KINDA CUTE, IF YOU'RE NOT BIG ON ORAL HYGIENE.

I WILL MAKE THE LAST ONE LEFT STANDING MY PET. I WILL NAME IT SNUGGLES.

I AM GROOT.

THAT *IS* A BETTER NAME.

WE'RE GETTIN' NOWHERE WITH THIS. I'M PRETTY SURE THERE'S MORE OF THESE @#$@ NOW THAN WHEN WE STARTED.

AMERICA'S RIGHT, CAROL--WE'RE OUTCLASSED HERE--

ARRGHHH!!

JUST KEEP FILTERING THEM--ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS--

OH, *HELL.* NOT *HYPERION.*

QUADRANT FOUR BREACHED.

QUASAR--
AVRIL--

IT HAPPENED IN AN INSTANT. THE DEFENSES WERE BROKEN, AND THE HORDE RUSHED THROUGH.

THEY CAME TO COLLECT THEIR TROPHY.

I CAN'T SEE THEM ALL! THERE'S TOO MANY--I--

SHE HAD JUST COME INTO HER OWN. SHE STOOD FOR *THE FUTURE.*

NO.

SHE WAS THE PROTECTOR OF THE UNIVERSE. AND WHEN SHE FELL--

--*HOPE* FELL WITH HER.

STEVE! QUASAR IS DOWN--I REPEAT, *QUASAR IS DOWN!*

WE *NEED* THAT SHIELD!

YOU HEAR THAT, TONY?

AH! COME ON!

WE'RE TRYING-- THE DAMAGE HERE IS JUST--IT'S *BAD*...

I'M SORRY, CAP--WE *NEED* MORE TIME.

THE ONE THING WE DON'T HAVE.

LUKE-- HOW ARE WE LOOKING ON YOUR END?

NOT A WHOLE LOT BETTER, CAP-- *UNFF*--THESE GUYS ARE RUNNING WILD.

YOU WILL *PAY* FOR WHAT YOU DID TO US, AVENGER--

CAN SOMEONE TELL THESE GUYS WE DIDN'T HAVE *ANYTHING TO DO* WITH BUILDING PLEASANT HILL? I DIDN'T EVEN *FIND OUT* ABOUT IT UNTIL THE WAY OVER HERE--

SOMETHING TELLS ME THEY'RE NOT GONNA BUY IT, DAREDEVIL--

THEIR ANGER HAS *CONSUMED* THEM.

BUT IF WE UNDERSTOOD THAT IT WAS ANGER THAT LED THEM THERE--

--WE FAILED TO GRASP THE DEPTHS OF IT.

ALWAYS KNEW I'D MAKE IT IN THE BIG CITY--I MEAN, *LOOK* AT THIS PLACE--TIMES SQUARE, ALL THE LIGHTS... SHINING SO BRIGHT.

BET ***NITRO*** CAN MAKE 'EM ***BRIGHTER,*** THOUGH--

NO--NO-- @#$!--

EVERYBODY GET BACK!!! HE'S GONNA--

OH MY GOD...

DIRECTOR--SIR--THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE IS ON THE LINE FOR YOU.

PUT HER THROUGH. MADAM SECRETARY--

DIRECTOR ROGERS. YOU'RE WATCHING THE SAME FOOTAGE FROM NEW YORK AS WE ARE, I'M SURE.

THE PRESIDENT HAS BEEN MOVED TO A SECURE LOCATION AND I'M BEING TOLD BY THE SECRET SERVICE TO DO THE SAME.

I NEVER THOUGHT WE'D SEE SOMETHING LIKE THIS. THIS CHITAURI WAVE, THE ATTACKS IN MANHATTAN AND NOW REPORTS OF HYDRA ACTIVITY ON THE GROUND ACROSS THE U.S.--

--IT'S ***TOO MUCH.*** I'M CALLING TO FORMALLY NOTIFY YOU THAT THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT HAS DESIGNATED THIS A FULL STATE OF EMERGENCY UNDER THE S.H.I.E.L.D. ACT--

--WHICH MEANS YOU, AS DIRECTOR OF S.H.I.E.L.D., ARE BEING PUT IN ***IMMEDIATE COMMAND*** OF THE U.S. MILITARY AND ALL FEDERALLY RECOGNIZED LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES.

THE COUNTRY IS IN YOUR HANDS, CAPTAIN. I CAN THINK OF ***NO ONE*** BETTER SUITED TO LEAD US RIGHT NOW. I'M JUST GLAD WE PREPARED FOR THIS.

THANK YOU, MADAM SECRETARY. BUT IT WAS MY MOST FERVENT PRAYER THAT THIS MOMENT WOULD NEVER COME.

MINE AS WELL--

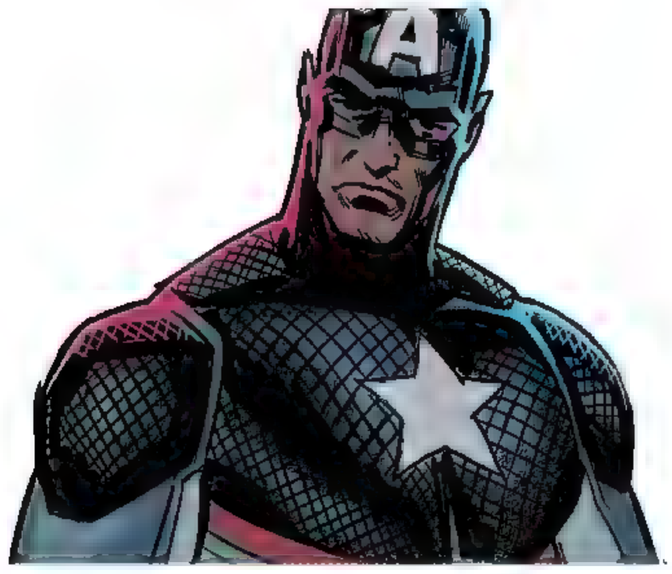
--MAY GOD HAVE MERCY ON US ALL.

WE DIDN'T KNOW IT THEN, BUT THIS WAS THE MOMENT IT ALL ENDED. THE MOMENT WE COMPROMISED EVERYTHING WE BELIEVED IN--

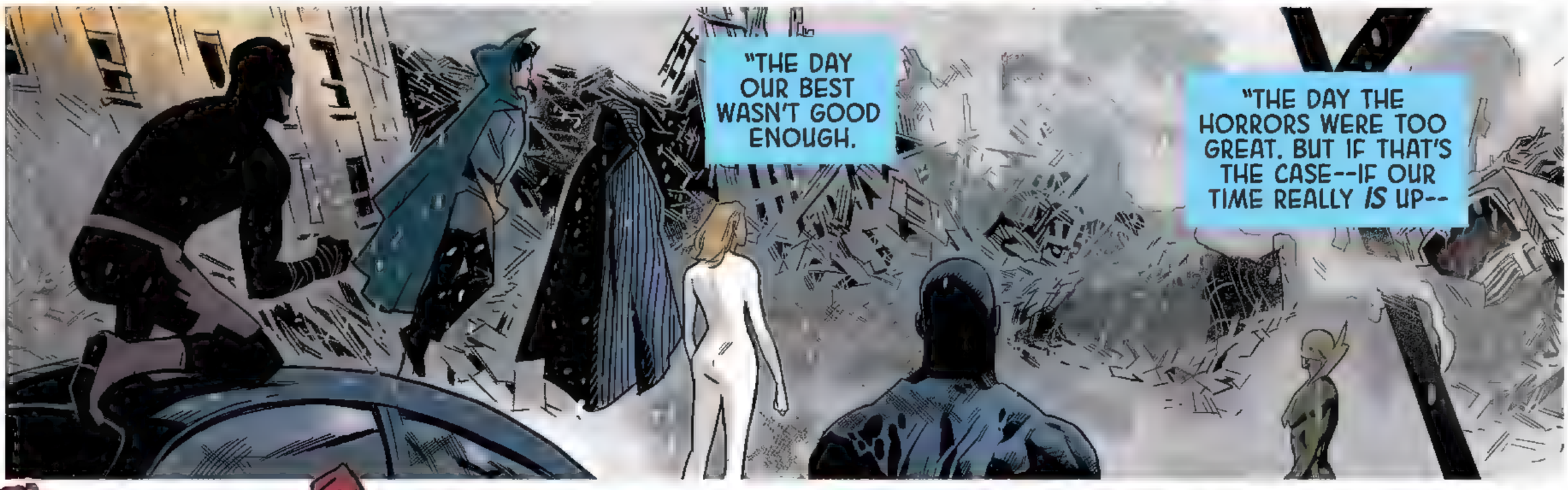
--IN THE NAME OF OUR ***FEAR.***

BUT IF WE WERE BROKEN AND HOPELESS BY THEN--

--HE WASN'T FINISHED WITH US. NOT *NEARLY.* FOR *HIM*--



--THIS WAS ONLY THE *BEGINNING.*



"I NEED YOU TO FIND THE WILL TO FIGHT TO THAT *LAST BREATH.*
"--THEN I HAVE SOMETHING TO ASK OF ALL OF YOU. LET'S LEAVE SOMETHING BEHIND. A SYMBOL-- A *TESTAMENT.*
"LET'S SHOW THE FUTURE HOW HARD WE FOUGHT TO PROTECT IT. LET WHATEVER SURVIVES THIS REMEMBER THAT WE *NEVER* GAVE UP, THAT WE GAVE *ALL* WE HAD TO SAVE THEM.

WHAT "HUH"?

I'M GETTING A GREEN LIGHT. SIXTH AUXILIARY IS ONLINE AND OPERATIONAL.

WHAT'D YOU DO?

NOTHING, I WAS BOOTING IT UP AGAIN--

THIS IS **IMPOSSIBLE.** NONE OF THOSE LINES WERE OPERATIONAL AFTER THE BLAST HIT.

TONY, IT'S OPERATIONAL.

RIGHT, BUT THAT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE--

TONY!

OH YEAH. **STEVE!** STEVE, HAVE I GOT SOME WORDS FOR YOU, MY FRIEND--

"--LET'S START WITH--"

"--SHIELD'S UP."

"NO NEED TO THANK US, WE WILL BE BILLING."

SHIELD OPERATING AT 100 PERCENT.

THEY DID IT!

GREAT WORK, PEOPLE! AND LUKE, WE HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN ABOUT YOU--

"--LOOKS LIKE YOUR *AIR SUPPORT* HAS ARRIVED."

OKAY, UNITY SQUAD-- I GUESS WE'RE AVENGERS AGAIN, LET'S SHOW 'EM WHAT THAT MEANS!

ALSO-- DOCTOR STRANGE CHECKING IN--HAPPY TO BE OF OBVIOUSLY INVALUABLE ASSISTANCE.

GOOD. NOW, LET'S TURN THIS THING AROUND!

CAROL-- YOU HOLDING UP OUT THERE?!

I'M DOING GREAT-- AMAZING!

SHIELD'S HOLDING JUST FINE--

--AND THESE CHITAURI DRONES ARE TOO DAMN STUPID TO KNOW BETTER! THEY'LL JUST KEEPING PLOWING INTO THE THING UNTIL THERE'S NONE OF THEM LEFT!

ALL WE GOTTA DO IS GET OUT OF THEIR WAY!

A WORLD LOOKED UP AND SAW THE IMPOSSIBLE BEING ACCOMPLISHED.

THEY WATCHED IN WONDER AS HEROES STOOD TALL.

THEY ALLOWED THEMSELVES TO FEEL SAFE AGAIN.

IT WAS A MOMENT TO HOLD ON TO.

MORE GOOD NEWS, CAP--

--THE BAD GUYS ARE FALLING BACK--TELEPORTING AWAY TO WHATEVER HOLE THEY CRAWLED OUT OF--

WASP HERE-- IT'S THE SAME ON OUR END, CAP-- SEEMS THEY CAN'T RUN AWAY *FAST* ENOUGH--

I'D LIKE TO MAKE IT VERY CLEAR-- I'M TAKING FULL CREDIT FOR THIS.

DIRECTOR-- SORRY TO INTERRUPT-- BUT WE'VE ESTABLISHED VISUAL WITH HELICARRIER CRESCENT. SHE'S STILL IN THE AIR, SIR!

TRY HAILING THEM ON SHORT-RANGE--

ALREADY AM, COMMANDER. NO RESPONSE. I'M GETTING THEIR READOUTS, THOUGH--

THEIR WEAPONS SYSTEMS?

ALL DISENGAGED.

OKAY-- PULL CLOSER-- TRYING HAILING AGAIN--

UH, MA'AM-- WE HAVE A PROBLEM--

WHAT IS IT?

UH--THE SHIP'S WEAPONS AREN'T ACTIVE BUT-- *THEY* ARE.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

I MEAN, THE CRESCENT IS MOVING. FAST. RIGHT IN OUR DIRECTION.

OKAY. EVASIVE ACTION--

I CAN'T GET ENOUGH THRUST THAT QUICKLY-- THEY WERE *READY* FOR US--

EMERGENCY TELEPORT--

I'M *TRYING*, COMMANDER-- SYSTEM'S NOT RESPONDING--I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S WRONG--

OH, *HELL*--

--BRACE FOR IMPACT!

KKKRRROOOOM

WE WERE SO CONFIDENT. SO EXULTANT.

WE WERE ASSURED OF VICTORY. IMAGINE OUR SURPRISE, THEN--

--WHEN IT WAS SNATCHED RIGHT OUT OF OUR HANDS.

KABOOM

WHEN, AS QUICKLY AS IT CAME--

--IT ALL JUST FELL APART.

CAMERAS AREN'T WORKING, MA'AM--BUT THE HEAT SENSORS ARE. I JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND IT. THE HOSTILES ARE BOARDING, BUT--

--OUR GUYS AREN'T EVEN ***FIGHTING BACK.*** IT'S LIKE THEY'RE SURRENDERING ON SIGHT! WE DO HAVE AUDIO--THEY'RE PLAYING SOME KIND OF MESSAGE ON OUR LOUDSPEAKERS SOMEHOW--

A PERFECT TRANQUILITY. A STREAM, A LAKE, A RIVER, AN OCEAN. YOU ARE HOME NOW--

THAT VOICE-- I RECOGNIZE THAT VOICE. IT'S ***DOCTOR FAUSTUS.***

THAT'S WHAT THEY'RE DOING-- THEY'RE ***BRAINWASHING*** US, SHIP BY SHIP, DECK BY DECK--THAT'S HOW THEY'RE MOVING SO FAST--

KILL THE SOUND! AND EVERYBODY, WEAPONS UP--

--WE'RE ABOUT TO MAKE SOME NEW FRIENDS.

SHARON--I NEED YOU TO TRUST ME--

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

JUST KNOW THAT--NO MATTER WHAT I DO--I LOVE YOU. THAT WILL *ALWAYS* BE TRUE.

STEVE--

HOLD YOUR FIRE!

I SAID--*HOLD YOUR FIRE!* I AM THE ONE WHO SPOKE TO YOU BEFORE THE FIRST SHIP FELL--

--I AM THE MAN WHO RULES THE WHEEL.

W-WHY DID THEY STOP SHOOTING?

STEVE--WHY DID THEY--

HAIL HYDRA!

GET--GET HER TO A TRANSPORT. AND IF ANYONE SO MUCH AS LAYS A FINGER ON HER, THEY ANSWER TO *ME.*

YES, SUPREME LEADER.

"SUPREME"--STEVE, WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON HERE?! HOW DID YOU--

OH GOD--STEVE, HONEY--THEY GOT IN YOUR HEAD, DIDN'T THEY? WHATEVER FAUSTUS DID--HE MUST'VE GOTTEN TO YOU FIRST. YOU HAVE TO FIGHT THIS--

SHARON--

--THAT'S NOT WHAT THIS IS.

NO.

NO--NOT YOU--YOU *CAN'T* BE--

I AM *SO* SORRY, SHARON-- I PROMISE YOU, I WILL TRY TO EXPLAIN--

STEVE--!!! STEEEVE--!!!

LET ME GO, YOU SONS OF--!!!

--WHEN YOU'RE READY TO LISTEN.

S-SUPREME LEADER? WE HAVE A VESSEL READY FOR YOU AS WELL.

GOOD. USE THE *ILIAD'S* COMMS DECK TO BROADCAST FAUSTUS' MESSAGE TO THE REST OF THE FLEET, THEN EVACUATE TO THE OTHER CARRIERS ONCE IT'S TAKEN HOLD.

I'LL BE RIGHT BEHIND YOU. BUT FIRST--

--I WANT YOU TO PUT ME THROUGH TO *CAPTAIN MARVEL.*

STEVE-- IS THAT YOU? WE'VE GOT INJURED UP HERE--I NEED TO GET THEM TO LAND AND MEDICAL--

HUH.

AGAIN "HUH"?

THE AUX LINE IS DOWN AGAIN. THE SHIELD IS STILL UP, BUT--NOTHING'S RESPONDING.

YOU CHECKED THE--

OF COURSE I CHECKED IT. BUT THIS DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE. DIAGNOSTICS SAY THE CONNECTION IS THERE.

UNLESS IT'S ON THE COMMAND SIDE. BUT IT'S PRETTY OBVIOUS WE'RE FIXING A ***HARDWARE*** PROBLEM--THE GIANT ***BOMB HOLE***--AND ***THAT*** WOULD BE A ***SOFTWARE*** ISSUE--

OR NOT AN ISSUE AT ALL--

THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE. UNLESS--

WHAT IF SOMEONE BOMBED THE MACHINE TO DO SUPERFICIAL DAMAGE, SO NO ONE WOULD NOTICE WHEN THEY BROUGHT THE SHIELD DOWN ON THE NETWORK SIDE?

YOU MEAN SO AN ALIEN INVASION COULD GET THROUGH OR SOMETHING? OKAY, BUT--IT DIDN'T. YOU'RE ON THE SAME COMMS AS ME. THE SHIELD WENT BACK UP IN TIME TO STOP IT--

SO WHY BRING DOWN THE SHIELD JUST TO PUT IT BACK UP AGAIN?

EXACTLY.

WHAT'S CHANGED?

STEVE-- IS EVERYTHING OKAY DOWN THERE? WE LOST CONTACT!

I NEED TO OPEN UP A PORTAL-- I REPEAT, WE'VE GOT WOUNDED UP HERE, BUT THE SHIELD'S NOT RESPONDING--CAN YOU HANDLE IT ON YOUR SIDE?

I'M AFRAID I'M NOT GOING TO BE ABLE TO DO THAT, CAROL.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN? LET US BACK IN--THE WAVE IS ALL CLEAR--

ACTUALLY, IT ISN'T. THERE WILL BE ANOTHER WAVE. AND THEN ***ANOTHER.*** EACH COMING IN MORE RAPID SUCCESSION. THEY WON'T STOP UNTIL THEY FIND THEIR QUEEN.

QUEEN? WHAT-- CAP, WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!

A SOVIET SCIENTIST NAMED IVAN KRAGOFF WAS THE FIRST TO FIGURE OUT HARVESTING A CHITAURI QUEEN WOULD BRING AN INVASION FLEET TO EARTH.

IN HIS LATER YEARS, HE WAS SO WRACKED BY GUILT OVER THE DISCOVERY THAT HE DEDICATED HIMSELF TO ENSURING EARTH WOULD NEVER MEET THAT FATE--

--AND SO HE CREATED THE FIRST DESIGNS FOR THE ***PLANETARY DEFENSE SHIELD.*** PLANS THAT YOU AND MARIA HILL WERE SO EAGER TO EXPLOIT THE MINUTE THEY WERE PUT IN FRONT OF YOU.

OH, GOD--

STEVE--WHAT HAVE YOU ***DONE?*** WHAT'S ***HAPPENED*** TO YOU?!

I'M DOING EXACTLY WHAT ***YOU*** WOULD DO.

YOU SHOULD BE PROUD OF YOUR WORK HERE, COLONEL. YOU BUILT THE SHIELD TO WALL OFF THE WORLD FROM ITS GREATEST THREATS-- AND NOW THAT ***YOU'RE*** ON THE OTHER SIDE OF IT--

--YOU ***HAVE.***

GOODBYE, CAROL--

"--THIS WILL BE THE LAST TIME WE EVER SPEAK."

STAGE ONE.
ALPHA FLIGHT SPACE STATION.
OBJECTIVE: EXILE VIA PLANETARY DEFENSE SHIELD.
MISSION: ACCOMPLISHED.

THE CHITAURI DUDES WERE THE *BAIT*--GET A LINEUP OF FIRST RESPONDER HEAVY HITTERS UP IN SPACE, THEN LOCK 'EM OUT SO YOU CAN--

--SO YOU CAN DO *WHATEVER THE HELL YOU WANT.*

WE NEED TO GET A DISTRESS CALL OUT.

TO WHO? ALMOST EVERYBODY THAT'S ACTIVE WAS EITHER UP IN SPACE WITH CAROL OR IN--

NEW YORK.

IT'S STRANGE--THE MOMENT FINALLY COMES, AND ALL I CAN FEEL IS RELIEF.

I SUPPOSE THAT'S ENOUGH--WHEN FACED WITH SUCH BEAUTY. SUCH JUSTICE.

AND YOU, WITH THE HELP OF THE DARKHOLD, ARE JUST THE MAN TO DELIVER IT.

THEY GAVE US A PRISON. THEY TOOK FROM US OUR VERY SELVES, OUR VERY SOULS, AND THEY MIRED US IN THEIR LIES.

SO WHAT WILL WE GIVE THEM IN RETURN NOW, BOB, OLD FRIEND?

OR SHALL I CALL YOU BY YOUR TRUE NAME--

--BLACKOUT.

R-R-REVENGE, ZEMO.

DEATH.

DARKNESS.

IT WAS THE CITY THAT REPRESENTED EVERYTHING WE BELIEVED IN.

A PLACE WHERE THE SKIES WERE FILLED WITH HEROES, WHERE ANYTHING COULD HAPPEN.

UNTIL THE VOID CAME AND SWALLOWED IT WHOLE--

--LEAVING NOTHINGNESS IN ITS WAKE.

STAGE TWO.
NEW YORK CITY.
OBJECTIVE: ISOLATE VIA DARKFORCE DIMENSION.
MISSION: ACCOMPLISHED.

TONY--YOU GETTING THESE FEED REPORTS? ABOUT MANHATTAN?

USED TO BE THE JOKE, RIGHT? WHY WOULD ANYONE LIVE IN NEW YORK WITH ALL THE SUPER-POWERED TYPES? THIS WAS THE **PLAN.** GET EVERYONE OFF THE BOARD.

PRETTY OBVIOUS WHERE THEY'RE GONNA HIT NEXT.

ALL AVENGERS, REPEAT--ANY AND ALL AVENGERS THAT ARE LEFT--THIS IS IRON MAN--

IF YOU CAN HEAR THIS, YOUR SERVICES ARE REQUIRED **IMMEDIATELY**-- WE ARE UNDER ATTACK--

--IF YOU CAN FLY OR ARE COVERED IN FUR, YOU ARE NEEDED.

IF YOU CAN READ MINDS OR SHOOT LASER BEAMS OUT OF YOUR NIPPLES, YOU ARE NEEDED.

EVEN IF YOU JUST LIKE DRESSING IN SKINTIGHT PRIMARY COLORS AND DELIVERING LONG LECTURES TO UNCONSCIOUS CRIMINALS--

--YOU NEED TO GET YOUR ASS IN GEAR!

THIS IS THREAT LEVEL RED, **DEFCON INFINITY STUFF** HERE, PEOPLE--

--WE NEED YOU TO GET TO WASHINGTON, D.C.!!!

STAGE THREE.
WASHINGTON, D.C.
OBJECTIVE: HYDRA TAKEOVER.
MISSION: UNDERWAY.

TO BE CONTINUED!

Secret Empire Prologue

April

Captain America: Sam Wilson #21

With Steve Rogers' Secret Empire on the horizon, America needs Sam Wilson more than ever --but has he already hit his breaking point?

Thunderbolts #12

Baron Zemo makes a final play for Kobik, the Cosmic Cube that started it all. Will Bucky Barnes and his team be caught in the crossfire?

Uncanny Avengers #22

The Unity Squad has been playing a cat-and-mouse game with the Red Skull--but it all ends here! And not everyone will finish on their feet...

Captain America: Steve Rogers #16

The final pieces of Steve Rogers' plan fall into place--and the world will never be the same.

SECRET EMPIRE

NEXT

THE MOST TRUSTED SUPER HERO IN THE WORLD HAS DECLARED HIS ALLEGIANCE TO HYDRA. WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR THE MARVEL UNIVERSE?

Secret Empire

May

Secret Empire #2

The Defenders struggle to survive in a Darkforce-enshrouded Manhattan... and a new hero uncovers the truth about what happened to Captain America.

Secret Empire #3

Under constant attack from wave after wave of invading Chitauri aliens, Captain Marvel and the deep-space task force under her command are waging a war of attrition--one they may not be able to survive!

Free Comic Book Day: Secret Empire

The Battle for Washington D.C. rages, but Captain America has an ace up his sleeve...

Secret Empire: Uprising #1

Black Widow leads the next generation of heroes on a mission that will challenge everything they believe in.

Welcome to the new Red Room.

ZONE